Endemic Bird Areas (EBA)

ACRONYMS | AREAS | COUNTRIES | MARINE | TERMS

DEFINITION

Critical regions of the world for the conservation of restricted-range bird species.

DESCRIPTION

Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) are regions of the world that represent natural areas of bird endemism where the distributions of two or more restricted-range bird species overlap. [1] A restricted-range species is defined as one having a historical breeding range of no more than 50,000 km. BirdLife International's Biodiversity project, which began in 1987, identified a total of 218 EBAs with most (77%) of them located in the tropics and subtropics. [2] EBAs vary in size (from a few square kilometres to more than 100,000 sq. km) and in the numbers of restricted-range species they support (from two to 80). About 93% of the world's restricted-range species occur within identified EBAs; the remainder occur in 'Secondary Areas', defined by the presence of single restricted-range species whose distributions do not overlap with any others. [2] Over a quarter of all the birds of the world have restricted ranges, and more than half of them qualify as globally threatened or near threatened, largely due to habitat loss and alteration. 70% of EBAs overlap with areas of endemic plants (Centres of Plant Diversity) and are also important for other endemic taxa, therefore EBAs tend to be priorities for broad-scale ecosystem conservation. [3]

SUPPORTED BY

BirdLife International

YEAR OF CREATION

Birdlife's Biodiversity Project begun in 1987. A complete publication on Endemic Bird Areas was published in 1998 [2]. The identification of EBAs was a one-off process and they are not being further updated.

COVERAGE

Global in extent, with 218 sites in different countries around the world. In addition, there are 138 Secondary Areas. [3]

CRITERIA

EBAs are defined and identified as: [2]

An area which encompasses the overlapping breeding ranges of restricted-range bird species, such that the complete ranges of two or more restricted-range species are entirely included within the boundary.

To identify areas with concentrations of restricted-range species, species distributions were mapped and overlaid with each other. This was done for all terrestrial birds with an estimated extent of occurrence of less than 50,000km^2 and was limited to estimated or known breeding ranges since 1800. Boundaries to EBAs were defined around bird distribution records, taking into account the altitudinal ranges and habitat requirements of all the restricted-range species present.

EBAs have been ranked for overall priority based on their biological importance (the number of restricted-range species, taxonomic uniqueness of those species and the size of the EBA) and the current threat level (the percentage of restricted-range species in each EBA which are threatened, and the categories of threat of these species), with 76 EBAs considered Critical, 62 Urgent and 80 High. [2]

MANAGEMENT

There is no specific management for EBAs. While many EBAs cover large areas, many sites within EBAs are already protected within nationally protected areas and also as internationally recognised areas (e.g. World Heritage sites). Moreover, one of the criteria for BirdLife International's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA), is the presence of restricted-range species and hence data used to define EBAs has also been used to define IBA sites.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – The identification criteria of EBAs do not specify any requirements for legal protection of the area. However, legal protection and/or requirements to comply with certain safeguard standards may be present at least in parts of these areas due to their often large size and potential overlap with legally protected areas and IBAs.

Biodiversity importance – EBAs are well established and recognised as regions of high irreplaceability typically within large areas based on species ranges. These areas are therefore of high conservation value, and as priorities for conservation attention. However, not everywhere within the EBA boundaries will necessarily include natural habitat appropriate for the restricted-range bird species for which the EBA is identified. The most significant biodiversity sites within EBAs will usually be identified as IBAs, at a scale more appropriate for conservation management. The EBAs greatly vary in size and due to their variable-scale approach the implications for business have to be considered on the basis of their actual size.

Social-cultural values – Because of their relatively large scale, EBAs are seldom a focus for local community engagement. However, the IBAs within them frequently are. This engagement often focuses directly on the restricted-range birds that make these sites distinctive, and which may be high-profile flagships for environmental conservation.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. Bibby, C. J. et al. Putting Biodiversity on the Map: Priority Areas for Global Conservation. (1992).
2. Stattersfield, A. J., Crosby, M. J., Long, A. J. & Wege, D. C. Endemic bird areas of the world: priorities for biodiversity conservation. BirdLife International. (1998)
3. BirdLife International website, Endemic Bird Areas



Sri Lanka blue magpie (Urocissa ornata), endemic to Sri Lanka (EBA). feathercollector/Shutterstock.com

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